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STUDENT DEVELOPMENT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT
LEADERSHIP AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

by

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in partial fulfillment
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For Katie, I know how much you would have loved to read this.

Abstract

This study compared two groups of college students' levels of self-actualization from Southeastern University, student leaders and non-leader students. The participants' levels of self-actualization were measured using the Short Index of Self-actualization (SISA). The study followed a cross-sectional design. Participants were recruited through in-person communication, emails, and an on-campus study recruitment software called SONA. The participants completed a questionnaire containing the SISA and various demographic questions. Results indicated that the findings of the study were not statistically significant; therefore, it could not be determined whether or not student leadership is positively correlated with higher levels of self-actualization. However, a replication study could prove beneficial in providing better understanding of the relationship between student leadership and self-actualization.

KEY WORDS: self-actualization, student leader, student-leadership, SISA

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Introduction

“Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What humans can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization” (Maslow, 1968). This quote by Abraham Maslow serves as an excellent description of self-actualization. Self-actualization is a term that can be difficult to define as there has never truly been a concrete definition. With so many psychological theorists (a list of which includes the likes of Kurt Goldstein, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers) attempting to define self-actualization and with the origins of a self-actualization concept going back to Aristotle in ancient Greece (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2017) self-actualization’s definition has continued to be dependent on the context of usage. For the sake of this study, the definition of self-actualization that I decided to rely on is as follows: self-actualization is the process exhibited by people that drives the realization and/or fulfillment of one’s life potential to be the best version of themselves they can possibly be.

The aspect of self-actualization that I am focusing on stems mainly from the ideas and teachings of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Both of these prominent psychologists are known for their work in developing the realm of psychology that has come to be known as Humanistic Psychology. Humanistic Psychology takes the approach of studying the uniqueness of person and the individual as a whole; this approach highly values experiences and motivations when relating to and attempting to help the individual (McLeod, 2015). A big part of self-actualization has to do with human experiences and motivation; thus, self-actualization plays an important role within the teachings and ideas of Humanistic Psychology. For both Maslow and Rogers, self-

actualization was viewed as the main goal to strive for; both of their humanistic approaches rested largely on this concept of self-actualization.

So, one sees that the idea of self-actualization has been around for a long time and it was a focal point behind one of the great movements in the realm of psychology. But what relevance does it hold today? Why should people care about self-actualization? How can this vaguely defined process possibly hold practical application today? I tried to answer these questions through the scope of the study that I have conducted. With these questions in mind, I attempted to shed light on the importance and relevance of self-actualization through its relationship with working leadership. Self-actualization is the process of constantly improving oneself and striving to reach one's fullest potential. In an article by John Keyser, the factors of growing as a person (likened to self-actualization) and leadership development go hand-in-hand. This article portrays personal growth (in areas such as personal skills, understanding, ambition, and others) as a necessity in improving one's leadership, and speaks highly of leaders who are self-aware. A gradual-yet-steady improvement, awareness of one's level of competence, and self-reflection are all listed as good leadership qualities. All of those qualities are also important qualities associated with self-actualization (Keyser, 2011).

Seeing how leadership and aspects of self-actualization coincide quite well and how the two share similar qualities makes for an interesting observation. I was curious to discover more and investigate the possible relationship between the two variables. Specifically, I sought to examine the possible correlation between self-actualization and student leadership. As a current college student attending Southeastern University and as someone who is a part of my university's student leadership department, I chose student

leadership to serve in the “leadership variable” role within my study. To better clarify what I mean by student leadership, I formed a working definition for what a student leader is for the sake of the study. A student leader is a student in an appointed formal position who works in collaboration with students and the institution to better the experiences available on campus and to enrich the lives of the student body. Meanwhile, a traditional student is a student that is not involved in any form of student leadership.

Southeastern University’s student leadership departments are very involved on campus with the intention of improving student life. To be sure that student leaders are best equipped to handle any situation and foster positive student experiences, the university ensures that student leaders receive training each semester and undergo regular evaluation. Both the semester training and regular evaluation are meant to promote growth and self-efficacy within student leaders – qualities which are necessary for self-actualization. As part of their jobs, student leaders also have to engage in tasks that promote personal growth and self-efficacy. Some of those tasks include planning events, counseling students, self and peer evaluation, and conflict resolution. With the kind of intentional time and effort poured into them and the work/skills required of them, student leaders would seem better equipped toward being more self-actualized. With that in mind, I hypothesized that student leaders would exhibit higher levels of self-actualization than traditional students.

The question of whether leadership is correlated to self-actualization delves into a realm of study that has not yet been explored in-depth. Little-to-no research has been done in this area, so I hope to be shedding light on something that could be of great value. However, the question remains, what relevance does self-actualization hold and why

should people care about it? Learning more about people's progressive levels of self-actualization and their self-actualizing tendencies (the drive and desire to reach a state of a fully self-actualized existence) should be something people care about because it's about learning who we are and where we can go. When one lives by seeking to self-actualize, then that person is always seeking to improve themselves in a holistic manner that includes all aspects of their personality. Also, they seek to relate in the best way that they can to their neighbors and the people around them. Therefore, I think that this study should be of some kind of importance considering that it touches on a subject that concerns itself with processes and qualities that make for better students, employees, citizens, and people as a whole. This study attempts to measure and understand levels of self-actualization in people who are going through college which is known as a time during which young people reach new levels of self-awareness and personal growth (Strang, 2015).

Literature Review

Self-actualization

Self-actualization and Theories

This section of the literature review is meant to take a comprehensive look at the topic of self-actualization and some of the theories associated with it. To understand self-actualization, we must go to its beginnings. The beginning of the form of self-actualization that I am discussing and using in my study began with Abraham Maslow. Maslow's psychology was focused on the person and one's inner nature. This inner nature is something that is inside of us and has always been there from birth. Everyone has this inner nature, but the inner nature is unique within each and every person. This nature is described by Maslow as being neutral or good; this is contrast to many popular psychologists who came before him, most notably, Sigmund Freud ("Comparison of Freudian," 2015). Maslow thought that Freudian psychologists placed too much emphasis on human weakness and viewed human nature negatively which obscured the understanding of psychological health ("Abraham Maslow", 2010). When one adheres to this inner nature, they seek the development of their unique self. This development is what is known as self-actualization. David Grinstead further explains self-actualization by saying, "Very few people actually achieve self-actualization. Most experience it as an urge, hope, drive, a wishing for something not yet achieved. Simultaneously you are what you are while becoming what you can be. Self-actualizers exhibit values that are goals. They desire what is good for others and self by doing right because they want to, need to, enjoy doing right, approve of doing right and continue to enjoy doing right. There is self-

control and self-discipline which is not found in the average person” (Grinstead, 2015, p. 4).

According to some, there are two types of self-actualizers. There are the *Y* self-actualizers that are healthy but do not have a transcendence experience, and there are the *Z* self-actualizers who have transcendent experiences. The *Y* self-actualizers experience self-actualization on the plane of the practical and concrete. Meanwhile, the *Z* self-actualizers experience self-actualization on a plane that includes peak experiences and plateau experiences (Grinstead, 2015, p. 5). For example, a *Y* self-actualizer experience would be something experienced in a day’s work or while sharing a meal with friends or family; meanwhile, a *Z* self-actualizer experience would be experienced through the birth of a first child or performing a concert in Carnegie Hall. The people included in my study consist of college students. That being said, the main focus of my study was on concrete and practical factors surrounding student leadership work and experience; therefore, my participant sample will reflect a group of *Y* self-actualizers.

The theory that really serves as the basis for self-actualization is the Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow discussed how people have needs and that some needs take precedence over other ones. Our most basic needs revolve around physical survival; once one of our needs is taken care of, then we move up to the next need to be fulfilled, and so on. Maslow divided these needs across five standard levels of categories (“What is Self-Actualization,” 2017). The first four levels of the Hierarchy of Needs are known as Deficiency Needs. These needs, starting from the most basic, are the physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs (Burton, 2017). As discussed, the lower needs generally must be met in order to continue up the Hierarchy of

Needs. For example, if a person is suffering from starvation, they normally will not really care about how they look or if a particular person does not like them. People trying to fulfill their basic needs may exhibit the following: yearning for gratification persistently, sickening or withering due to deprivation, and responding therapeutically to gratification of the need (Maslow, 1957). However, every need does not *always* need to be met in order; there are rare exceptions (Green, 2000). Even Maslow realized that his theory concerning his categories of needs did not serve as absolutes. He realized that his satisfaction of the needs did not serve as an “all-or-none” issue, and he admitted that his earlier statements may have given “the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges” (Maslow, 1987, p. 69). The top and final level of the hierarchy of needs are the growth needs. Unlike the deficiency needs which stem from the lack of something, the growth needs stem from the desire for growth. Every person has the ability and the desire to move up towards self-actualization; however, the progress of moving upward to self-actualization is often interrupted and detoured by failure to meet lower level needs and by poor life experiences (McLeod, 2017). Maslow also clarified that being self-actualized is not about reaching a specific point; it is more a matter of degree. He said, “There are no perfect human beings” (Maslow, 1970, p. 176). The road to self-actualization is not a set or determined path. There is no “formula” that ensures one reaches the highest level and becomes self-actualized. It is completely dependent on the uniqueness of the individual, and the motivation for self-actualization will lead people down different directions and different life paths (Kenrick et al., 2010).

The other theorist that was very important in the development of the idea of self-actualization was humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. Concerning self-actualization, Carl

Rogers came up with a theory that people work within their “real selves” to reach congruence with their “ideal” selves; thereby, the person will attain the status of a “fully-functioning person” (Olson, 2013). The real self is described as the person that we currently are; the person who is defined by what they have done up to this point in their lives. Rogers describes the other variant of self as the ideal self. The ideal self denotes the self-concept that the individual would most like to possess. It is the person one would ideally like to be and strives to be (Pescitelli, 1996). These two versions of oneself play an important role in reaching self-actualization according to Rogers.

Like Maslow, Carl Rogers believed that self-actualization is indeed a process that is innate and is a motivating force for people. To this effect he is quoted saying, “The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism” (Rogers, 1951, p. 487). For Rogers, people who can match their real selves with their ideal selves are viewed as self-actualizing, and self-actualizing people are called “fully functioning persons.” Another area in which Maslow and Rogers agreed was that self-actualizing (becoming a fully functioning person) was a continuous process; it is a process of always becoming and changing (McLeod, 2014).

Rogers came to identify the self-actualizing person by five distinct characteristics. (1) The self-actualizing person is open to experience; they are able to accept both positive and negative emotions. They do not deny negative emotions; rather, they strive to work through them. (2) The self-actualizing person is known through their existential living. They are in touch with different experiences as they occur in life, and they avoid prejudging and preconceptions when it comes to other people. They are able to fully appreciate and live in the present, not focusing too much or putting excessive weight on

the past or future. (3) The self-actualizing person places stock in their feelings. They pay attention to and have confidence in their feelings, instincts, and gut reactions. They trust themselves to make the right choices. (4) The self-actualizing person is very much in tune with creativity. Creativity and risk-taking are a big part of their lives, and they do not play it safe all the time. This involves the ability for one to change and adjust and seek new experiences. (5) The self-actualized person lives a fulfilled life. They are happy and satisfied with life and are always looking for new challenges and experiences to face (McLeod, 2014).

Looking at the literature presented on self-actualization and self-actualizing people, one can see what the process looks like and what characteristics self-actualizing people possess. That being said, what is it that makes self-actualizing people better versions of themselves? The answer to that question really depends on how one's culture defines the "better version." Given the literature presented thus far, one can gather that the ideal version of oneself that was talked about by Maslow and Rogers is characterized by qualities such as independence, interpersonal skill, emotional intelligence and stability, self-efficacy, and a proactive disposition. Looking at the combination of these particular characteristics, it is strikingly apparent that these qualities are particularly descriptive of a Western paradigmatic way of being. One analysis of Abraham Maslow's writings on self-actualizing people points out that "the concept of individual self is seen as an integral assumption of American psychology that is ordinarily unquestioned. It appears that Americans naturally assume that each person has his own separate identity that should be recognized." The analysis goes on to highlight that there have been cross-cultural studies completed on self-actualization that suggest that this theory of personality

is a function of American society (Francis & Kritsonis, 2006). Based on this evidence, one could make the assumption that the “best version” of oneself described by the theory of self-actualization is a Western construct. Given that the measure in the study to be conducted will be administered to an American sample, the Western bias should not present a confound within this particular study.

Studies on Self-actualization

This section is meant to look at a few studies that were conducted that held some type of concern with self-actualization. The point of reviewing these studies and what they yielded is to be able to see what things affect and share a relationship with self-actualization. By doing so, not only are we better able to understand the process of self-actualization, but we are also able to see what kind of relationships might link self-actualization and leadership.

The first study investigated work motivation and work engagement and how those variables related to young people’s vocational training and levels of self-actualization. In this study, work motivation (Pinder, 2014) referred to a “set of internal forces that initiate work-related behavior and determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration” (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016, p. 93). Work engagement (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008) refers to “a positive work-related state of fulfillment characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016, p. 93). The researchers formulated two hypotheses concerning the study. The first hypothesis maintained that

unemployed youth who have attended more training courses and experienced longer workplace training periods are more likely to consider their training adequate, which, in turn, helps them achieve self-actualization, and thus ultimately enhances their work motivation. The second hypothesis stated the same, but it predicted that those factors would enhance work engagement (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016).

A total of 209 unemployed young people participated in the study. The age range was from 17 to 30 years of age; the average age of the participants was 22.67 years ($SD = 1.93$). Self-actualization was assessed by 12 items that measured youths' sense of expectation of success and achievement, based on their experiences during the year prior to the survey. Sample items included "I had the chance to polish my skills", "I felt as if my identity has been distorted", and "I fulfilled my life responsibilities" (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016).

It is worth noting that the researchers discovered that those participants more actively involved in training found their training more adequate, which, in turn, caused them to achieve higher levels of self-actualization. The research also concluded that training variables, and development programs empowers young people with personal autonomy raising self-actualization (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016). Through this study, I noticed that personal involvement in training and development programs may help raise levels of self-actualization. Southeastern University uses both of those in the training and employment of their student leaders. Therefore, this study serves as positive evidence towards my hypothesis, and it works well to link aspects of student leadership to self-actualization.

The next study focused on self-actualization and its qualities and how they relate to being able to find employment. Being able to find employment is considered a point of progress along one's journey to self-fulfillment (self-actualization).

This study sought to find the relationship between self-actualization and employment for young women who are "at risk." The researchers defined "at risk" as including young women who grew up in poor single-parent families, foster care, or families with many siblings or families that are unemployed themselves. Concerning this study, the researchers agreed with the idea that empowerment is not only an external activity, but it is also an internal state of mind (Sadan, 1999). Humanistic theories align with this frame of thought surrounding empowerment and self-fulfillment by arguing that self-actualization promotes finding a sense of self-esteem that sustains the person through stress (or in this case, finding a job) (Folkman, 1997; Masten, 2001). Specifically, in searching to find the relationship between employment and self-actualization, the researchers' aim was to find how the young women defined the relationship between the two variables (Huss & Magos, 2014).

For this study, a phenomenological qualitative research method was chosen that would focus on how the participants defined the concepts of employment and self-actualization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 1997). The study consisted of 12 participants. The group focused on skills and difficulties related to finding and maintaining a job. Two months after the ending of the group, the participants were invited to participate in an activity where they were asked to draw visions of their dreams and goals and self-fulfillment; they were then asked to explain their drawings in a semi-structured interview form (Huss & Magos, 2014).

The data collected showed that the participants held ways of being that are defined as “high” levels of self-fulfillment in high regard according to their relationships with self and others. They exhibited high levels of self-awareness, acknowledging the reality of their situations while still holding on to a drive and ambition related to employment and independence. The study revealed a “synergetic” relationship between employment and self-actualization. Having a higher view of self and a greater inner drive may cause one to work for employment more readily. This dual relationship could provide some interesting evidence concerning the relationship between leadership and self-actualization. Perhaps those involved in student leadership will more likely exhibit higher levels of self-actualization due to the aforementioned “synergetic” relationship exhibited by employment and self-actualization.

The final study sought to test longitudinal associations between self-esteem and sport participation among adolescents. The study sought to test the associations while addressing the mediating role of perceived sport competence. In this study, the term *self-esteem* is related to *self-enhancement*, both of these concepts are important and essential as related to self-actualization. The study also promotes that someone with high self-esteem is someone who shows the characteristics of emotional stability, subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and resilience to stress (Diener & Diener, 1995) – most of which are also important qualities of a self-actualizing person (Clark, 2017). Therefore, *self-esteem* will serve as the parallel to self-actualization within this study.

Organized sports are generally reported to provide several elements that facilitate self-esteem (Fox, 2000; Fox & Wilson, 2008). One way a person’s self-esteem can be defined as is “. . . the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (Harter,

2012, p. 22–24). Most of the studies done on this subject have been cross-sectional, and they have not been able to prove a cause and effect relationship between sport participation and self-esteem. The researchers hoped that conducting a longitudinal study concerning the mediating role of perceive sport competence (a statement of personal ability that generalizes across the sport domain; Fox, 1997) would help better identify the effect on self-esteem. The researchers hypothesized that higher sport participation at baseline would predict higher subsequent self-esteem through higher subsequent perceived sport competence (Wagnsson, Lindwall, & Gustafsson, 2014).

The study used a longitudinal cohort design with three waves (T1 = Year 1; T2 = Year 2; T3 = Year 3) of surveys. The data was collected each spring from schools in two different provinces in Sweden. Participants included in the study consist of students who completed all three waves of measurement ($n = 920$). Upon collecting and analyzing the data, the researchers found that the mediating role of perceived sport competence in the longitudinal association between sport participation and self-esteem was evident both from a skill development and a self-enhancement (self-actualizing) perspective (Wagnsson, Lindwall, & Gustafsson, 2014). The main point taken from this study is that perceived competence in an area in which a person is experiencing regular involvement plays a significant role in developing self-esteem and self-enhancement. Although my study is not on sport participation, it does involve participation (whilst being part of a team) in something that involves commitment and requires a set of skills; this participation also comes with a set of expectations that if not met have consequences – these qualities of leadership are similar to those found in being involved in a sport. That being said, Southeastern University works with their student leaders to equip them

through mentoring and training that is meant to build our “perceived leadership competence.” According to the study above, a rise in perceived competence would translate to higher levels of self-esteem and self-enhancement; therefore, one could expect a rise in levels of self-actualization.

One study that was of particular interest was a study conducted on self-actualization as related to age. In this study, the researchers mention how self-actualization is the pinnacle of Maslow’s personal development theory – supplemented by the hierarchy of needs – does not specify an age range for individuals’ levels of progress. Based off of previous work that maintained that people over the age of 36 have a tendency to be more concerned with higher motives than those under the age of 36, the researchers conducted a study to look at the influence of age on levels of self-actualization. The researchers hypothesized that older people would be more self-actualized than younger people (Ivtzan, Thompson, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013).

The study consisted of 240 participants with an age range from 18 to 60. The mean age of the participants recruited was 38.4. The measure used to evaluate levels of self-actualization was the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) which, based on previous studies, has been accepted to be a valid and reliable measure of self-actualization. The results of the study showed that participants over the age of 36 did, in fact, show higher levels of self-actualization than those below the age of 36 (Ivtzan, Thompson, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013). Given that the participants for the study to be conducted will be comprised of college students, there is a very low possibility that lifespan age will have an effect on the results of the study. However, the idea that the older one gets, the more self-actualized one becomes is a factor that may play into the results of the study.

Short Index of Self-actualization

As self-actualization is one of the two key variables in my study, I was faced with the issue of finding a measure suitable for my study that would help evaluate levels of self-actualization within participants. The measure that I decided on was the Short Index of Self-actualization (SISA; Jones & Crandall, 1986). Claiming that most other measures were either impractical (for the sake of length) or useless (for lack of focus on self-actualization), Jones and Crandall developed a measure that they believed to be practical and self-actualization-focused. Jones and Crandall (1986) tested the following characteristics of the SIS: internal consistency, test-retest reliability, content validity, and response sets and susceptibility to faking. A total of 500 college students from several colleges participated in this study; originally, it was a 19-item measure, but they reduced it to the 15-item measure it is now. The participants were asked to complete the measure twice with a 12-day interval in between test completions (Jones & Crandall, 1986).

For internal consistency, the data showed that the 15-item scale worked best, and there was virtually no difference in strength of self-actualization between male and female participants. The test-retest reliability for the 12-day interval was .69. The means between the two tests did not differ significantly; thus, there was no practice effect or regression to the mean. Participants who took the test normally and then re-took it with the intention of answering in a favorable manner made up the “fake good” procedure. The mean was 45.79 for those who completed the index under normal instructions. When these same individuals were instructed to attempt to make a good impression the mean actually fell to 43.59. This was not a significant decrease. In validity studies, it had significant positive correlations with a total score on the most widely accepted measures

of self-actualization such as the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI). One problem with the POI and other accepted measures is that the length of the measures hinders their usefulness in many research contexts – the simplicity and non-threatening length format of the Short Index makes it very useful in a variety of research contexts. The Short Index also had significant correlations with the following four factors: autonomy or self-direction, self-acceptance and self-esteem, acceptance of emotions and freedom of expression of emotions, and trust and responsibility in interpersonal relations. All four of those factors are all important aspects for the functioning of a self-actualizing person (Jones & Crandall, 1986).

Based off of the results of the study conducted, the Short Index of Self-actualization has been proven to be both reliable and valid. With that in mind, I chose this measure for its quality and its relative convenience (a 15-item measure can be completed quite easily and quickly). It proved to be a very valuable tool in measuring levels of self-actualization within the study's participants.

Leadership

General Leadership

The article on leadership authored by John Keyser (2011) that was described earlier suggested that leadership development and self-actualization go hand-in-hand. As one grows as a leader, they should also experience growth in levels of self-efficacy and ability. Seeing that the two work together, I sought out common traits that characterize good leadership and leadership development.

Iuri Matsuura (2016) talks about good leadership in an article he wrote concerning the traits of good leaders. He includes a quote by John Maxwell that says, “Leadership is not a noun. It is a verb.” This quote suggests that leadership is more about doing and becoming rather being; this denotes leadership as being something active rather than a passive position. Matsuura gives 5 specific traits that are essential to good leadership. (1) *Trust* is labeled as the foundation of success in any leadership position. Trust is built through maintaining good relationship with those you work with and those who work under them. (2) A good leader shows *initiative*. They do not allow things to happen to them, and they pursue their goals in a driven manner. (3) A good leader maintains a level of *presence*. They are there for those who need help and guidance. Matsuura emphasizes that leadership is about building bridges not walls. (4) A good leader is an even better *learner*. They should always be hungry to learn more and acquire valuable knowledge and experience. (5) Lastly, a good leader is a *mentor*. They should share knowledge and experience they have gain in order to help those they are leading. Listening, asking questions, and giving advice should all be part of how a leader interacts with the people around them (Matsuura, 2016). Other common traits of an effective leader include a sense of ethics and integrity, teamwork, and effective communication (Montillo, 2015). All of the qualities listed above could provide someone with an excellent guide to what a student leader should look like because those are traits that student leaders are encouraged to have and trained to possess.

As a leader, one must learn to understand and work through certain psychological traits in order to thrive and be successful. Motivation is both a powerful tool and a dragging weight. The self-actualizing person is motivated to push forward in reaching

fulfillment through work, but sometimes, the motivation to avoid confrontation or pain may steer one away from the path of self-actualizing. A good leader will be able to discern and find the right motivation within to push forward. Another set of traits that a leader must learn to work with are fear and anxiety. Good leaders will recognize that those traits can be over-powering, but they will possess the experience and mindfulness necessary to deal with them properly. Lastly, a good leader is able to overcome uncertainty. Uncertainty will attempt to tear down what many great leaders have built (senses of self-efficacy, self-assurance, self-awareness) through a hazy picture of the future (Shah, 2015). All of these problem-causing traits can be overcome through qualities exercised by the good leader and self-actualizer such as self-insight, self-regulation, and self-identity (Riggio, 2011).

Even now, initiatives are being taken to promote leadership development. The Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) has called for increased student leadership development (SLD) by identifying leadership as a desired curricular goal (Janke et al., 2016) CAPE encourages schools and institutions to do so by identifying a set of SLD competencies that align with their mission and formulating an SLD model for the curriculum to follow. Assessment should play an important role in SLD so as to be able to measure and evaluate levels of SLD. Most importantly, the SLD should be supported by the members of the school and facilitated by its culture. A student who engages in SLD should come out a learner, a manager, an advocate, a collaborator, a communicator, self-aware, an innovator, and a professional (Janke et al., 2016). Considering the nature of this new program, I would suggest that schools who

employ SLD would see levels of self-actualization increase within the student body as a whole due to the nature of the program to focus on student improvement.

Studies on Student Leadership

This section is meant to look at a few studies that were conducted that held some type of concern with student leadership. The point of reviewing these studies and what they yielded is to be able to see different qualities and tendencies associated with student leadership. By doing so, not only are we better able to understand student leadership, but we are also able to see what kind of relationships might link leadership development to self-actualization.

The first study analyzed high school leadership practices for their inclusion of students in organizational leadership dialogue and decision-making and the effects these factors have on student achievement (Elemen, 2015). Interestingly, about twenty-five percent of student learning can be attributed to school leadership variables (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). That is a high percentage when considering the role student leadership plays in students' development. The researchers turned to the social design theory and the distributed leadership theory to serve as the theoretical basis for their study. The social design theory suggests that solutions to public problems can be effectively developed through engaging stakeholders in a democratic process; meanwhile the distributed leadership theory suggests including a diverse array of stakeholders in the decision-making process of organization leadership and additionally allocate power and tasks to a variety of individuals in the organization. By implementing

these theories into high schools, the researchers expect the high school students to achieve higher levels of achievement (Elemen, 2015).

There were 149 participants in this study. The survey instrument used contained 63 items concerned with level of academic achievement (GPA and college and future career confidence), level of civic participation (levels of citizenship including personal responsibility and participation), and students' perceptions of their high school's leadership practices (Elemen, 2015). The results of the study showed that many students did have opportunities to participate in high school organizational leadership dialogue and decision-making, but those opportunities were usually limited. The conclusion based on the data that the researchers came to was that providing students with opportunities to participate in high school organizational leadership dialogue and decision-making may provide for lasting educational value, increasing their achievement levels. A more immersive application of the social design theory and the distributed leadership theory would suggest that student achievement would be much higher (Elemen, 2015). This conclusion would suggest that perhaps higher levels of achievement and higher levels of self-actualization would follow higher levels of student involvement in school leadership and organization. As discussed, Southeastern University does both in respect to student leadership; thereby, I propose the results would reflect the same in my study.

The next study sought to examine students' perceptions of participating in a program headed by a student-led health improvement team. It has been proposed that involving individuals in program design to improve their quality of life, and that of their community, could lead to feelings of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2012). For this study, the researchers were concerned with three individual level outcomes. Those outcomes

were related to the following: the interpersonal (self-perception and self-efficacy), the interactional (critical awareness of environment, decision-making, and problem-solving skills), and the behavioral (exerting influence in community groups). The researchers hoped to see high levels of those individual outcomes with participation in the student-led initiative team (Gutuskey, McCaughtry, Shen, Centeio, & Garn, 2016).

The researchers put together a team of nine randomly selected 3rd and 4th graders (ages 8-10). Upon collection and analysis of the data, the results showed that the youth-led health reform process had a significant impact on several areas of students' life skills and health behaviors. The study showed that the student leaders showed improved leadership skills such as enhanced student responsibility, increased levels of self-confidence, and self-awareness as role models (Gutuskey, McCaughtry, Shen, Centeio, & Garn, 2016). Once again, higher levels of self-improvement and self-betterment are seen to coexist with student leadership. In this study, the students who experienced an attainment of their higher potential were those who participated in a student-led, student-focused program – student leadership.

In the final study, the researchers sought a better understanding of the shared positive elements exemplary outdoor programs are using to develop their student leaders. By finding the commonalities among these programs, one could narrow down the elements to a few effective student leader development strategies. Leadership ability is often cited as an essential quality for success, and it is highly desired and sought after (Northouse, 2016; Rost & Barker, 2000). In today's professional world, leadership development serves as an avenue for universities to help graduates succeed in finding a job and succeeding in life (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Universities are becoming

more serious about cultivating leadership in students, so understanding the processes and components of leadership development is essential. The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model describes a process of identity growth that occurs incrementally over a series of six stages: Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis (Komives et al., 2005). The purpose of this study was to explore the influences that allow student leaders of cocurricular outdoor programs to develop leadership identities over the course of their time spent within five exemplary programs, within the framework of the LID model (Sandberg, Martin, Szolosi, Early, & Casapulla, 2017).

The researcher conducted interviews with the leaders of five outdoor programs within the United States. Once the researchers analyzed the data collected from all five leadership programs, they came back with five key influences: institutional support, transformative experiences, meaningful program culture, facilitative structures, and authentic leadership opportunities. These results support the findings that adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning are essential for students to develop their leadership abilities (Komives et al., 2005). Those four elements underlined what the researchers found when they interviewed the leadership programs (Sandberg, Martin, Szolosi, Early, & Casapulla, 2017). The major elements associated with student leadership development in this study are elements that can be associated with the student leadership program at Southeastern University. Southeastern University's student leadership program includes the following: adult influences by having adult leaders mentor and work with student leaders; peer influences by having student leaders work alongside each other as well as having them provide peer evaluation

for each other; meaningful involvement by expecting and evaluating intentional engagement with students and duties required within the leader's job description; and reflective learning by requiring time spent with the team and with an adult leader for the purpose of reflection and personal/leadership development.

With each study that has been reviewed, I have made parallels with the findings of the researchers to the practices of the Southeastern University student leadership department. Each study brought forth some type of relation to student leadership at my university, and they also had some type of relation to the self-actualizing of persons (specifically students). This is meant to drive home the relationship between successful studies and variables that my study consists of, as well as point toward the ever-present relationship that can be seen between self-actualization and leadership. According to the literature presented and the studies reviewed, there is good evidence to suggest that my hypothesis is reasonable.

Method

Recruitment Procedures and Sample

The participants for this study were recruited from Southeastern University, a Christian liberal arts school located in the Southeast region of the United States. The recruitment and subsequent study were approved by the university's institutional review board. I recruited the student leaders (these are students who are a part of and work for a team that is part of student leadership – the teams included in this study were Residence Life, Campus Wide Events, Commuter Life, Student Government Association, and First Year Experience) by meeting with each team individually and reading a recruitment script that had been approved by the institutional review board. After meeting with each team, I sent the head of each leadership team a recruitment email with the link to the questionnaire to send to each member of their team. The comparison group was recruited through a study-participation software the school uses called SONA. Students in lower-level courses are encouraged to participate in a study for course credit. The students are provided a range of studies and given options to earn credit without participating in any research, so those who participated in my study did so of their own accord.

There were a total of 124 participants who initiated the questionnaire. Of those participants, 7 were excluded from the study for failing to complete the Short-index of Self-actualization. The students participated through the SONA software. Demographic information about the participants can be found in Table 1 (Appendix A).

Measure

As described in the literature review, the Short-index of Self-actualization (Jones & Crandall, 1986) was used in order to measure participants' level of self-actualization. The index includes 15 items presented as statements. The participants were to respond by choosing a number that fit on a 1-5 scale. Each number represented the level to which the participant agreed with the statement presented. The response options were as follows: 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree (the original measure does not make use of a "neutral" response; the researchers added this response based on a misreading of the original measure). Tests of the measure's reliability and validity showed acceptable test-retest reliability, concurrent validity, and construct validity. A test-retest study conducted found that the measure possessed a retest reliability coefficient of .84 (Jones & Crandall, 1986). The validity studies presented for the index demonstrate its soundness as a research tool. Jones and Crandall's (1986) work highlighted that the index's correlations with the total score on the Personal Orientation Inventory, the Time Competence, and Inner Directed (those all being trusted self-actualization measures) scales were all highly significant.

The sociodemographic questions were included as part of the questionnaire. Collecting the data through an online questionnaire allowed for easy and widespread participation, as well as easy data collection and analysis. The data were exported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25). Data collection through the online questionnaire eliminated the need for transposing raw data into SPSS and decreased human error in inputting data to an electronic file. Lastly, having the participants complete the questionnaire online allowed them to do so at their convenience

rather than having to set up a time to take the questionnaire in person. The online method certainly proved to be the most convenient and efficient method for all parties.

Data Collection Procedure

During the recruitment process, possible participants were contacted by email or recruited through SONA. The student leaders were sent an email which contained a link to the questionnaire. This email also contained general information about the study, such as the amount of time it would take to complete. Students who were recruited through SONA were directed to the questionnaire through a link as well.

The online questionnaire link was open to participants for approximately two weeks. When the emails were sent, the participants opened a link leading to the online survey containing the measures. Participants were informed that, by completing the survey, they were indicating that they were over 18 and consented to participating in the study. Participants were informed, as well, that they could exit the survey at any point. The actual questionnaire opened up with the sociodemographic questionnaires first. After answering those questions, the participants completed the Short-index of Self-actualization.

Results

A total of 117 people had complete data for all variables. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were significant ($p < .001$) for gender, age, rank, race (Black or African American; Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin; White; other), and student leadership status, indicating that these variables were not normally distributed. However, these statistics indicated SISA scores were normally distributed.

In terms of gender and race, the comparison between leaders and non-leaders came back showing virtually no differences in the composition of those two groups. Also, there was no difference between student leaders and non-leaders concerning age. However, there was a difference in rank distribution with Pearson chi square indicating there were more upper-level students and fewer lower-level students in the leader group compared to the non-leader group.

On the association of SISA scores with demographic variables there were no significant differences between men and women (males $M = 52.04$, $SD = 5.08$; female $M = 51.36$, $SD = 5.09$). There were no significant differences across ranks (freshman $M = 51.95$, $SD = 5.42$, sophomore $M = 52.04$, $SD = 5.47$, junior $M = 52.35$, $SD = 6.06$, and senior $M = 50.16$, $SD = 5.86$). There were no significant differences across the four racial groups (Black/African American $M = 52.94$, $SD = 7.17$, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin $M = 52.67$, $SD = 6.01$, White $M = 51.37$, $SD = 5.59$, and Other $M = 50.00$, $SD = 4.77$). There was also no significant correlation with age.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the average SISA score for student leaders to that of non-leaders. Levene's test for equality of variances came

back as .008; therefore, we determine that the equality of variances is not assumed.

Contrary to my prediction, results indicated that the student leaders ($M = 52.32$, $SD = 8.00$) did not score significantly higher than the non-leaders ($M = 51.52$, $SD = 5.25$), $t(25.35) = -.45$, $p = .66$, two-tailed. The difference of 0.8 scale points was small (scale range: 15 to 75; $\eta^2 = .008$), and the 95% confidence interval around the difference between the estimated population means was relatively imprecise $[-4.48, 2.88]$.

The following analyses are follow-up exploratory analyses conducted only in the subsample of 22 student leaders: student leader hours (students' reported hours spent in leadership activities per week) was significantly positively correlated with higher average SISA ($r = .46$, $p = .031$). However, there was a non-significant correlation between SISA and number of semesters of experience as a student leader ($p = .89$). Also, there was no difference in hours by gender, race, or rank as reported by t-tests, ANOVAs, and correlation.

Summary and Conclusion

In this study, the researchers tested levels of self-actualization in student leaders and students who are not leaders. The researchers' hypothesis concerning this study was that student leaders would exhibit higher levels of self-actualization than non-leaders. In order to test the hypothesis, the researchers utilized independent t-tests, one-way ANOVAs, and correlations. The data reported student leaders as having a higher mean self-actualization scores, but the difference was not significant. Because the data was not significant, the hypothesis was rendered null. Due to the non-significant data gathered, the results did not support my hypothesis. Although the results were not conclusive, there were some parts of the data that yielded some positive results. One thing that the researchers found was that the number of weekly hours a student leader works had a positive correlation with their level self-actualization. The nature of this correlation is uncertain – as to whether working more hours helps one become more self-actualized or that a more self-actualized person would work more hours.

Unfortunately, due to the non-significant nature of the data collected, it is difficult to take a stance on most of the literature presented. This lack of significant data to either support or disprove my hypothesis complicates the matter. Since, the researchers did not find enough proof to be able to say that their hypothesis was correct, technically, all the literature that stated that leadership and its facets would be related to higher levels of actualization were not consistent with the researchers' findings. However, the issue concerning the disparity in sample numbers between the two groups was a definite factor that contributed to the skewness that affected the data, resulting in a null hypothesis.

Therefore, all that literature may be valid, it is just not entirely applicable to the study's results.

Despite the limited utility of the literature presented in this study, there are still significant findings that can be supported through the literature. For instance, the finding that hours spent at work is positively correlated with higher levels of self-actualization shows parallels with the study that found that longer periods of time spent at work training was positively correlated with higher levels of self-actualization (Ngai, Cheung, & Yuan, 2016). The study conducted on perceived competence and its positive correlation to levels of self-actualization (Wagnsson, Lindwall, & Gustafsson, 2014) may also provide parallels to this study's findings. Perhaps, student leaders who work more would consider themselves more competent as a person or as a worker. Of course, this is speculation as perceived competence was not measured in this study, but it does present a possible factor that links the two variables – one that could be further explored in a replication study.

On a scale of 15-75 possible points, the participant groups scored in the higher half of possible points with group mean scores of 52.32 and 51.52. This is in contrast to what some researchers might have determined, the participants in this study exhibited fairly good levels of self-actualization. Some researchers claim that very few people experience self-actualization (Grinstead, 2015). Taking the scores that the participants achieved, it would be interesting to see how they would progress considering the studies that claim that one's levels of self-actualization increase with age (Ivtzan, Thompson, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013). That theory did not translate to this study well considering that self-actualization scores were pretty even across ages in this study;

however, the theory comes from a study that tested lifespan age where the range was from ages 18 to 60. Therefore, the discrepancy is understandable.

The idea that time spent working for student leadership is positively correlated to levels of self-actualization is further supported by the study conducted by Elemen (2015). This study looked at student leadership programs at a high school and sought to find what factors correlated well to student development. The researchers found that higher levels of student involvement in student leadership were followed by higher levels of self-actualization. The more involved one is student leadership, the more time they will spend working; therefore, this provides support to our study's findings related to time spent working.

There is another theory that might explain why those who work more have higher levels of self-actualization. The theory is that people who have a higher sense of self tend to seek work more than those who do not (Huss & Magos, 2014); therefore, those who work more will exhibit higher levels of self-actualization because they already have a higher sense of self. In other words, those who are more self-actualized would be more driven to work more hours than those who are less self-actualized. This then begs the question, is student leadership the product or the cause of higher levels of self-actualization? A replication study in the form of a longitudinal study would certainly be more helpful in answering that question.

The Short-index of Self-actualization (SISA) showed adequate internal consistency reliability in this study. That being said, the researchers added an unnecessary component to the measure that may have possibly interfered with its reliability. The SISA included four levels of response to each item of the questionnaire:

strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The researchers added a response that appeared as “neutral.” This may have changed how participants responded to the questions as opposed to if the measure had been administered as it was originally intended. The SISA was ideal for this study – it was fairly brief, easy to take, and reliable. I would not have used any other measures considering how well the SISA worked for the researchers.

I believe the greatest weakness of this study was the disparity between the amount of student leader participants (22) and non-leader participants (95). The skewness caused by the participant disparity made it more difficult for the study to yield significant results. As a cross-sectional study, causation becomes more difficult to pinpoint since data is collected from only one point in time. Another weakness of the study was the misreading of the original study which led to the inclusion of a “neutral” option (refer to methodology section). I believe that a replication study would be a good follow up to this study with the purpose of having a more equal set of participant samples to draw data from. A replication study might make use of incentive for participants; this might help in gathering more student leader participants. In addition to a replication, a longitudinal study, in place of a cross-sectional one, would be very useful in helping narrow down the factors that might help correlate reveal the nature of correlations between variables. In my opinion, there are still significant findings to be discovered using a template of this study through replication. Also, the alternate finding concerning student leadership work hours and higher levels of self-actualization is a finding worth investigating because it could point to some causational evidence for the relationship between self-actualization and student leadership work. As a student leader myself, it could be assumed that I might

have a bias toward a result that favors student leaders. However, through unbiased administration of the questionnaire and the use of an objective measure for self-actualization (Short-index of Self-actualization), we believe that the researchers did everything expected of them to avoid bias.

In conclusion, the researchers' hypothesis was not supported. That being said, the study did yield some positive results that could be turned into further studies. Also, the study does not have to end as insignificant. Through the errors and mistakes, we were able to learn what did and did not work and where we can go from here. For instance, sample size could be better next time, and the researchers could use the original four response options for the SISA rather than the five that were used in this study. In the end, the purpose of studying self-actualization is to find what motivates and drives to become better people, and hopefully, take what we learn and apply it to our daily lives. The betterment of humanity will always be a worthwhile scientific pursuit.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Demographic Composition of Sample ($N = 117$)

Mean Age (<i>SD</i>)	19.99 (1.75)
Gender	
Male	46 (39.3%)
Female	70 (59.8%)
Race	
Asian	1 (00.9%)
Black or African American	18 (15.4%)
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	24 (20.5%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1 (00.9%)
White	57 (48.7%)
Endorsed Multiple Races	16 (13.7%)
Class Rank	
Freshman	41 (35.0%)
Sophomore	24 (20.5%)
Junior	26 (22.2%)
Senior	25 (21.4%)
Student Leadership Composition	22 (18.8%)
Residence Life	16 (13.7%)
Campus Wide Events	4 (03.4%)
First Year Experience	2 (01.7%)
Student Government	1 (00.9%)